POEM AT THE GOING RATE

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for the Minutemen

by

RM
Haines

Dead Mall Press | 2024

Never sat down and agreed to do this or anything, but it seems like [the Minutemen were] trying to write about everything. The whole world, the history, the future, what can be, could be, would be, what might have been.

--Mike Watt of the Minutemen

+/-

It's all parts.
You can add up anything.
Dollars, miles, beats per measure.
Doesn't matter what it comes to, it all changes.
Gold zeroes, silver ones, the ashes.
It's what you do with it, how you use it, that's history.
All else is pawnshop.
A bank gives out free therapy, a landlord fronts his own band.
The whole place is mapped with finance mythology.
Go down to the water, see the supply chain, the sheer gross tonnage.
It's all a pop song.
It's the good ship Profit & Thanatos, the good ship Defending Our Interests.
All of it's a war vibration, droning on, vomiting money.
Can a telecaster wreck that?
Can you make it kill itself for the people?
Watch the speaker cone, the exit sign, see the index blur.
This music is a sun plugged right into the radio.
Doesn't matter what sells or eats its own tail.
Doesn't matter where it ends.
It's life, it's all cosmic, all a machine.
The next part is already happening.

+/-

Concrete eats up the rain.
Storefronts change.
It's all the same when the engine turns over, the world starts up again.
To think: it's just a game of tag, of hide and seek.
To think light years, to think the dirty port.
Economy just means keeping track.
It's knowing what's OK to lose, what adds.
These are pages on the floor of the van.
Styrofoam cups, bottle caps, a freeway map of California.
Nobody can reach the sum.
Nobody lasts.
You dip a bucket in the river, see what comes up.
Spill the new songs, watch the words popping like soap bubbles.
Asphalt, rebar, skeleton & chalk, the greenpurple gasoline shine.
This is for the death of Cop City.
This is for the drummer at the needle valve factory.
This is a cord soldered right into the jack.
Every single day is the whole fucking world.
A dartboard, a large collider.
A kid staring at the actual sky.

+/-

We do this in love & chaos.
We walked out on the grave, wrote the new week in minutes.
Even the frays look right, fucked up & plural, the scrapyard tells us how.
It's bent because the world was really there.
It's dirty because work loves.
Get in the ignition, crawl around.
Scramble the wavelengths, a new mind bleeds through.
The contract goes blank, shreds itself, says funk is the answer to the void.
Says no one's lost anymore, the ocean is proletarian, the orcas closed down the port.
You wrote it on the clock, wearing ear plugs & goggles, the machines eating money & air.
Heard the cops have a hold of your pamphlets.
Saw my name in the mouth of a judge, the block filling up with condos, the alley a dirty tourniquet.
I saw sonic cartilage stripped & hanging in trees, doesn't mean anything.
I said this is John Coltrane to me.
This is Louis Auguste Blanqui.
The rent will turn to snowmelt & old wrappers in a ditch.
We'll be leaflike and pardoned before the stars.
And our sweetest friend is gone.

+/-

Glue it to your heart, hold on.
The universe is communist & alive.
The parts scatter, everyone gets a side.
Move into the splices, the rips in the montage, the molecules & staples
dream it too.
Each day is a cracked river, a new face eternity lets you see.
Are you paying attention to any of this shit?
It's Friday afternoon, time is totally insane.
It's Tuesday night, and the trees say, "1987, calcium carbonate, Tyvek."
They say, "Brickwork, ticketstub, chainlink, dime."
It's all covered with coffee grounds, phone numbers, math for fake budgets.
Come down & I'll make you sandwiches, give you beer, a place to sleep.
Come down & I'll read your poems again.
The streetlamps are spotlights for the shy cricket singers.
The concrete is the memorized skin of a god.
This next part is a fire alarm, I'm glad.

+/-

The shock troops of capital came playing guitars.
The cops came dressed like memes, making beats & streaming live.
They make it all adjunct, no benefits, extracted right out the neuron.
I don't know how a song even lasts sometimes.
Hardcore riffs in a gated community, tone rows & feedback in ads for the bank.
Someone throws a brick saying CAN'T YOU TELL WHAT SOUNDS LIKE THE TRUTH? CAN'T YOU REINVENT TIME EACH TIME?
Someone says, MY BRAIN IS A PARKING LOT, A SMASHED MAILBOX IN THE WEEDS.
The revolution walks on stage & dies, the kids go home.
You wake up and, shit, it's morning.

+/-

The weekdays turn over like ugly cards.
Nothing but lacerations, finance, ghosts in the vein.
I'm not listening to that shit, switch it off.
This a HEART ATTACK, the valves are WRECKED, it's AMPLIFIED.
THIS IS THE REASON FOR CELLS TO DIVIDE.
It's the Sun & the Moon, I'm not even kidding.
It' the ocean choking on dead labor, it's teen idol Arthur Rimbaud!
You shout the lyric at Nazis and run through them like a cannon ball.
They grow out their hair, kiss each other, quit their live stream pyre.
Now the job is don't go insane, don't let anybody get evicted.
The job is make music strong enough for the end of the world.
The whole thing is melting, shitting itself in the check-out line.
Fifteen guys hold contracts on the earth's psychosis.
And still they expect us to pay.

+/-

Fascists can eat shit from a trash can.
See these mannikins puke their brains in a Nazi bullhorn, screaming death
through six thousand layers of psychic lucite hell.
That's their name forever now.
Eyes & fingers crumbling like drywall, a monument to white microplastic
blood.
Watch the sunflare spell it out, laugh them to shreds, write it blank.
Watch the iron-lattice black heart tendon snap to nothing, broken
behind their eyes.
That's the noise angel we amplify, blooming in the wreckage of days.
That's an actual hex, the best line in the song.

+/-

What happens is electron palimpsest, a hyper-mediated dream sea.
What happens is the moon comes up & accuses me of nationality, of
practicality & credit scores.
Then someone says, Let go of this American embarrassment.
Let go of the cut-rate synapse ID, art without ads, a dead room at the
Western Motel.
And yes, I hear it! I am CHANGED, I will take out new loans for my band!
I will beg of the gurus, the governor & blockchain!
I am TIRED of income-driven stress positions, let me EARN & ACCRUE,
promote triage & scabs, LET MY PSYCHIC VALUE LIVE
FOREVER IN THE CLOUD!
What? No, someone else, I'm dodging the bill right now.
There's a reason to refuse it, to print things cheap.
It's what this music is.

+/-

Dead vibrations want to live your life.
You walk around inside it, nothing's happening.
You wake up & the cops hand you an award, you're a pop station again.
So we build a new economy, try not to die in plastic wrap.
We make the new zodiac with labor & paper, with thirty second songs.
It's a new jukebox to collapse this way, all of it wrong, ecstatic.
History is set to explode all day.
Bored teens in the parking lot, smell of gasoline, grease traps.
Janitors talk shit, blowing smoke rings by the dumpster.
The music wakes on a hospital radio, in a routine transaction of the eyes.
The music breathes ashes, it's an endless conversation.
We can put anything with anything!
It's June 16th forever again.
Eat a plum on the dock in Pedro, in Ohio, watch the Liffey flowing past.
Keep the tub caulked, the gun oiled, keep our heads connected to our bodies.
Any way you can get free, do it.
Any medicine you make, share it everywhere.

+/-

It all goes forward, even your ears, your hands.
Even the day job is music, a tape recorder in the frontal lobe.
Go home & play it back, head exploding at the sink, heart in a spiral.
I get terrified, eternity comes so close.
Looking through the eyes of millennia, even the dishpan holds a secret.
You run around with nerves like a needle, the wrong moon all over the
place, plugging wires into dead dreams.
You get adjusted to anything, it's a landfill, a suit of concrete, fuck it.
Let the spine fall out in the river, each vertebra is a fish, you're a light
year humming along, strumming, blooming meteors.
You wade the vibrations, hear alien sirens, it's ECLIPSED CORTEX
FEEDBACK FOREVER.
Someone tells you you're dead already & it all makes sense, eternity, you
even smile & nod.
Sometimes you even get paid.

+/-

A sound wakes up in your skull.
A voice that eats presidents, executives, kills its own lies.
Its speech means towerfall, letters sprouting mouths.
Shredding itself, shedding like pollen, a sun flare wrecking the circle.
Let the days improvise sentences, navigate accidents, trick the bank.
See how it all comes back again.
You can't reject it, there's nothing lost, the dumpster is angelic.
Even the crumbs & mumbles, even spoons clattering drawers, psychic knives in the sink, the lettuce and credit card asphalt screenshot.
With anything as anything with anything.
Property laid out like a clown in the head.
The river mouth, the river ear, the full stop arriving like a bomb, a birth-ending star, a cut cord, wire and navel.
Just set out like a wave and break, explode and fall like laughleaves, stray meteors, like spring.
Language is the money no economy can keep.
Language, the ruined car we drive.

+/-

The sentence stops itself, pulls up stakes.
The lines like iron filings to the magnet (nebula, rose, bullet, fray).
This is more than a person holds.
It's an accelerant, a set of cables, a borrowed amp.
It said, THE OLD NIGHTMARES MEAN NOTHING ANYMORE,
RETURN TO SENDER, WRONG ADDRESS, WRONG ALIAS
& MIRROR.
To make the seconds feel hours, their circular breathing, the signal back
into the speaker, the cry.
To make the voice die & come back again, nothing haunts bc it all belongs,
the end keeps going.
Like flames are the answer to predictive shit, a river the answer to grifts.
It's all in transit, in collision, where the light begins, where the earth.
It's where the sky & studio, where the waves, it's listening, bleached &
radiant
& screaming its heart on the air.

+/-

Fuck it, hit record, publish the thing yourself.
Stumbling finds a way, mouth at an angle in the ear, hosted and fed by its ghost, a tape deck & stethoscope on loan.
It takes years to hear it like you're already gone.
Then you're right there, catching every sentence in the street.
You're hearing each second as it goes.
Nobody is only who they are.
Nobody knows where their own hands end or what the wires plug into.
It's 11:21 PM, August 25th, 2023.
It's two cents a sheet plus cost of ink.
There's nothing to hold to but the pieces you have, there's nothing else to think with, feel through, know.
This skeleton is not a skeleton until I'm gone.
Linoleum, windowpane, red paint peeling from the door.
Death can't ruin anything, it's all in motion.
Even the accidents will sing.
Are you up?

+/-

Get in the van, finish the sentence, start again.
No exits, a vortex & conduit, the akashic cassette dubbed & fluttering in the brain.
THE SOUND IS ALL, IT'S THE RHYTHM, THE ACTUAL BATTERY.
The contract language can't last, you feel brand new again.
All of it happening in advance, familiar as an old dream.
Choose one thing to be, the other is already there, the sky ripping open with voltage flux.
It's a holiday of all ills forgiven, an end to the sentimental deathsquad con.
Wake up in the infinite ear, life spilling into the vestibule & labyrinth, the semicircular canal.
Your head is a prism of bone, a heart beating endlessly inside it, look.
The blood flows clean, goldsilver & cruel.
Its cells show star after star.

+/-

Stopped, it starts again.
Out of the dirt, exhaust and grease.
Out of the unfunk, the muddle of osmotic nightmare.
The body clocks in, leaking fuels & fossils, sobbing industrial chemicals.
The body carves the air like a record lathe.
The room full of scraps, a head stacked w/errors, each one trying to save you.
YOU BREAK IN TO FIND YOU'RE ALREADY THERE.
The instant is twin to eternity, the clock is dross.
It's a shout in the street, a single forgotten day.
It's every sentence you speak, swarming, warming, arming.
It's awake at night with an ox in the heart, thinking about him gone.
Thinking about the mind sliced up & filled with old kitchens, with lost stories
& keys, dust on all the jokes.
You & I standing beside the insomniac city trees.
We piss in the backyard, stare up at the voidsky, rename constellations.
Say there's the Anchor, and there's the Corona.
And that one? that's the Mother of All the Songs.

+/-

All of it in anything.
It's every particle, grains & petals, it's clorox & quasar & CCR.
It's the concrete walls, the socket & hinge, the guy with a mop who's got four more hours.
Anybody as anybody, he's everybody, nobody even TIPS THIS GUY!
HE CLEANS OUT THE URINALS EVERY NIGHT!
HIS MUSIC IS A VIBRATIONAL SIGNATURE IN THE LANGUAGE OF QUARKS & NOW HE'S DRUNK, HE'S NOBODY, SHE'S YOU, SHE'S MY BEST FRIEND FOREVER & HER NAME IS THE REAL KARL MARX!
Look, it's History, Improvisation & Imagination or you end up in the Algorithm Extractor Impersonation Complex.
It's why Sam Rivers again, it's why Andy Gill, the mask of Don Van Vliet.
It's the entire neuroplasmic meshwork & all of its violence exploding from our fingertips each day.
TEMPER IT, nail something down, learn the changes, it's everything every chance we get.
It's bare hands in the chewed food in the trap, what of it?
Nothing matters but keeping the mind on fire.
Nothing else pays for gas & then drives.
Nothing ever dies, it can't—
When the music is louder than anything.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to the memory of D. Boon and to the music he made with Mike Watt and George Hurley in the Minutemen.

Many of these poems first appeared on my blog, *Out of Its Wooden Brain,* in the summer and early fall of 2023. Since their original appearance, I've revised them heavily and added several new ones. Also on the blog, I have written about the band's ethos and politics, especially in the first part of a series called "A Poem at the Going Rate." The band has been an inspiration not just for this book but for Dead Mall Press itself.

These poems (or, poem—it's both many and one) loosely incorporate quotes, ideas, attitudes, and speech patterns from the band's lyrics and interviews. This happened more through intuition, immersion, and memory than through careful documentation, and a spirit of improvisation and freedom runs throughout. Also, as the poem grew, it developed its own momentum, and the connection to Minutemen becomes more indirect and personal to me. It's an eccentric homage.

Additionally, elements of the book draw on James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which band member Mike Watt reported as a major inspiration for him. In this book's epigraph, Watt is drawing a comparison between the band's ambition and Joyce's in *Ulysses:* to write about everything. This idea was essential to me in conceiving the poem, although that linkage may be obscure to others (it's there if you look hard enough). I write about this link in more detail in the essay "The Minutemen on Bloomsday" at deadmallpress.com.

RM Haines is a writer and adjunct instructor living in Ohio. His poems have most recently appeared in *Protean, Prolit, Works & Days* and *Not for Resale*, and *The Tiny*. His book-length publications include *A Dark Address* (2020, reissued 2024) and *Interrogation Days* (DMP 2024). He runs Dead Mall Press and also publishes his writing online via the blog, *Out of Its Wooden Brain*. More info about him and his work can be found at deadmallpress.com.